of External Affairs, while addressing a business delegation from Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and representatives of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry on July 7, 2003, *inter-alia* reiterated India's commitment to the concept of a South Asian Union.

(b) Pakistan has so far not reacted positively to India's declared readiness to enter into discussions to work towards a South Asian Union.

(c) South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member countries are exchanging tariff concessions under SAARC Preferential Trading Arranagement (SAPTA). A Committee of Experts has been constituted to draft a Comprehensive Treaty Regime for establishing a Free Trade Area in the South Asian region.

Potential of Indian Manufacturing Sector

†2727. SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) had suggested a six point programme to Government to increase competitive potential and global operation of the Indian Manufacturing Sector;

(b) whether according to the IACC, Indian companies can establish their manufacturing facilities in different parts of the world in marketing conditions; and

(c) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI CHENNAMANENI VIDYASAGAR RAO): (a) to (c) The IACC has conducted an in-house study in this regard which had not been submitted to the Government.

Rate contract for purchase of computer systems

2728. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) whether competent authority issued an office memorandum during December, 1998 on purchase of computer systems by Government Departments;

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) whether Government are aware that DGS&D has finalised generalised specifications for personal computers and initiated the process of concluding the rate contract;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether DGS&D has concluded the rate contract for computers;

(e) if so, the details thereof including the year from which the rate contract would be applicable for purchase of personal computers by various Ministries/Departments;

(f) if not, the reasons therefor; and

(g) whether open tender system is a must for purchase of personal computers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI CHENNAMANENI VIDYASAGAR RAO): (a) Yes, Sir. Ministry of Finance (Department of Expenditure) had issued an O.M. on 17th December, 1998.

(b) and (c) Yes, Sir. The generalised specifications finalised are aimed at catering to the general requirement of the indenting Department/Offices.

(d) to (g) Yes, Sir. Rate Contracts are being regularly concluded since 15.12.1999.The last Rate Contract concluded was valid upto 8th July, 2003. Advertised Tenders for conclusion of fresh Rate Contracts are due for opening on 22.8.2003. Individual Central Government Departments can procure personal computers through DGS&D Rate Contracts without inviting tenders as per provisions under the General Financial Rules.

Coastal Special Economic Zone in Karnataka

2729. SHRI K.B. KRISHNAMURTHY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government of Karnataka has sought 'in principle' the approval for establishing coastal Special Economic Zone;

(b) if so, when the proposal was received by Government;

(c) the estimated cost of the above project; and

(d) the present status of the proposal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI CHENNAMANENI VIDYASAGAR RAO): (a) to (d) A